FORGIVENESS - Matt. 18:21-35 Communion Meditation 4/4/65

The principle of forgiveness has always played a primary role in man's relationship to God--and man's relationship to his fellow man. In fact, it might be said that civilization became a possibility when men began to forgive each other, for the opposite principle--the principle of retaliation leads only to chaos.

Judaism of the first century had its presecriptions for forgiveness as it did for every other matter. According to the Rabbi's a righteous man was required to forgive an offender three times. After the fourth offense he could be justly punished. Against this background of the going religious formula we hear Peter question Jesus. ("Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?") You can see that Peter was actually being very magnanimous. The law required him to forgive 3 times, but he was willing to forgive more than twice that number of times. Jesus answered, ("I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven") prefaced a parable that spelled out just how far a man should go, and how very deeply human forgiveness was related to the forgiveness of God.

One difficulty here, however, is that when we talk about forgiveness we are essentially bringing in a member of other themes: sin, atonement, reconciliation, most of which we have been thinking about over the past several weeks. Forgiveness implies that there is something that needs to be forgiven. In the case of God's forgiveness--man offense committed against him. This offense, or continual offending, is called Sin and it's existence has been proclaimed by men of faith from time immemorial. Men of all religions, have always seen God sd

pride is our sin —
and pride prohibits us from seeing our sin.

↑ 2.

is no way out, that is, unless God himself forgives us and accepts us even as we are.

This, of course, is what good about the news of Christianity; that God does forgive--that he has forgiven by taking our offensiveness upon himself; that his self-initiated forgiveness is sealed by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Thus far, I have described, very briefly, sin and forgiveness, and I have been able to do so without being at all specific or mentioning anything that is tangible and common. Perhaps this is another expression of our sin. We don't hesitate to talk and think philosophically and academically about God. We can even bring ourselves to confess our sin, in general terms, and to believe in original sin, so long as we don't have to be too specific.

Jesus however, was most unphilosophical and most specific. When he talked about sin he meant the wrong one man does to another one which grows out of his sin against God. And when he talked about forgiveness he took the same approach. God's forgiveness is a meaningless thing until a man experiences another's forgiveness for himself freely & unconditionally.

What do we have to forgive each other? I have a person in particular that I think someone is to offend me, and two of us in my circle of friends who I feel close together will, sooner or later, offend one another. Certainly the secret of success in that most intimate of human relationships, marriage, is the willingness that lives in another person to whom I have committed my life. I will offend her--she will offend me; and our relationship will be lasting and successful only so long as we accept each other as we are and forgive each other's offensiveness.

God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ. But the Church is aslo the community of the forgiving; those who forgive because they have been forgiven; those who accept others as they have experienced God's ~~for-~~ acceptance ~~giveness~~; those who pray ("forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors") ~~and know that this is one idea not two~~.

As we commune, let us be that community - accepting God's Forgiveness in J. Christ - and extending that same Forgiveness to each other.